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# GROUP ACTION

By Col. B. R. WARD, R.E.

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# Group Action

*And the existing  
Industrial Unrest*

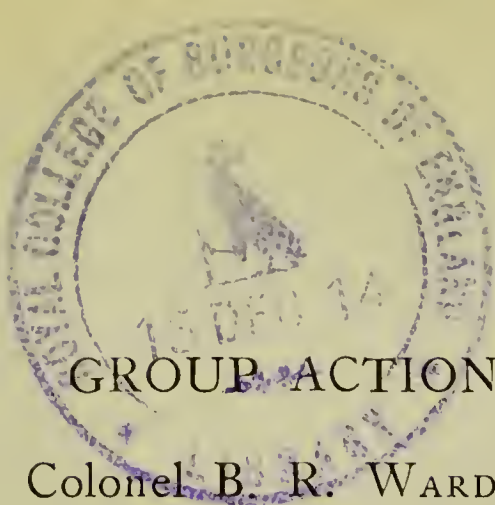


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## GROUP ACTION.

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In an interesting article in the *Daily Mail* of the 7th June, entitled "Syndicalism or Citizenship," Mr. H. G. Wells declares that there is no way out of our present anarchy, to use his own words, "unless we can discover a broad and promising way from the present condition of things to nothing less than the complete abolition of the labour class. That, I know, sounds a vast proposal, but this is a gigantic business altogether, and we can do nothing with it unless we are prepared to deal with large ideas. If St. Paul's begins to totter it is no good propping it up with half-a-dozen walking sticks, and small palliatives have no legitimate place at all in this discussion. Our generation has to take up the tremendous necessity of a social

reconstruction in a great way ; its broad lines have to be thought out by thousands of minds, and it is for that reason that I have put all the stress I could in those contributions I have made to the *Daily Mail* upon our need of discussion." Without anticipating the form of national plan that must emerge from this great debate, Mr. Wells seems to consider that the solution will be found in some action on the part of the State. Another solution of this problem is surely conceivable if the problem is taken in detail instead of as a whole. Bacon writes in his essay on "Education"—"The great multiplication of virtues upon human nature resteth upon societies well-ordained and disciplined. For commonwealths and good governments do nourish virtue grown, but do not much mend the seeds." In other words, social reform is initiated by small groups rather than by national governments.

Considering the industrial problem in this light, a solution will more readily be found by encouraging and giving

honour to well-organised industrial groups than by endeavouring to form a complete national industrial organisation at once.

Military organisation is a branch of political organisation, but efficiency is obtained in this by analogous methods to those that would be successful in economic or industrial organisations. A concrete example from military history will illustrate what I mean.

During the early years of the war with revolutionary France and Napoleon at the close of the 18th century and the commencement of the 19th, the organisation of the engineer branch of the British Army was exceedingly defective ; not only was the training of the officers inefficiently carried out but the training of the men, so far as concerned their duties in the field, was not carried out at all. The officers belonged to the Corps of Engineers, while the rank and file were known as Royal Military Artificers ; the uniform of the Corps of Engineers was red, while the Royal Military Artificers



were dressed in blue; not only was the training bad, but there was a lack of vital touch between officers and rank and file. A small group of junior engineer officers who used to meet in London at various intervals, on their return from the many expeditions undertaken during those years all over the world, used to discuss the causes of inefficiency and arrive at conclusions as to the best method of reform. The mouthpiece of this group was a Captain of the Corps of Engineers—Charles Pasley—whose centenary is being celebrated this year by the Royal Engineers at Chatham.

In season and out of season, Pasley urged the following reforms:—First, that junior officers and men should be trained together in their field duties, and secondly—that the rank and file should be named “Engineer Soldiers.”

Nor did Pasley confine himself to making recommendations. While in command of a Company of Royal Military Artificers at Plymouth, he in-



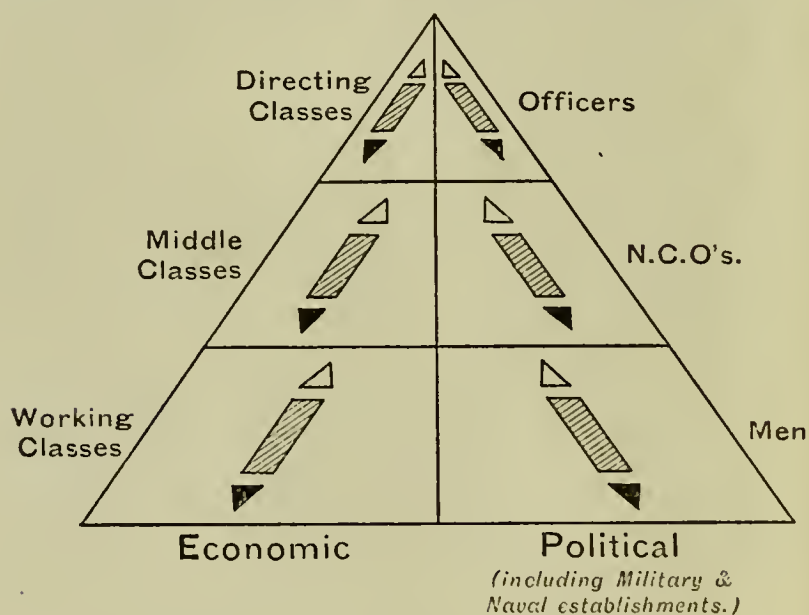
augurated schools which showed the authorities that his scheme of reform was a practical one. On the 7th April, 1812, after the successful assault of Badajoz, Lord Wellington wrote to the authorities explaining that the very severe losses suffered by him in the assault were due to his not having had an efficient engineer force under his orders. Following so closely upon the recommendations of the group of Royal Engineer officers represented by Pasley, and in view of Pasley's successful experiment at Plymouth, a Royal Warrant was signed by the Prince Regent on the 23rd April, 1812, authorising the establishment of a Royal Engineer school of instruction at Chatham, with Pasley as its first Director.

Pasley remained in charge of this school for the next 29 years, and thoroughly reorganised the Corps of Engineers. In the Crimean War from 1854 to 1856, the efficiency of the Engineers Corps was as striking as their inefficiency had been during the war against Napoleon.

This example of successful group action, and of the possibilities of useful reform when the problem is tackled in detail, is surely a hopeful analogy for us to consider when dealing with problems connected with our present industrial unrest.

The industrial unit, like the military unit, is a comparatively small group of individuals, and both groups have to be dealt with broadly on the same lines, namely as a problem in human government.

The accompanying sketch of two sections of the Social Pyramid represents graphically the analogy between the industrial and military problems.



Mr. Wells' idea that the broad lines of our social policy have to be thought out by thousands of minds is surely an ultra-democratic one. The plan of campaign, whether economic or military, is surely the work of one mind, however numerous the individuals required to carry it out and perfect it in detail.

How would Napoleon's campaign in Italy in 1797 have succeeded if the plan of campaign had been thought out and discussed by the thousands of individuals composing the Army of Italy, instead of being quietly formulated in the brain of the Commander-in-Chief?

Similarly, what success would attend the policy of a business house if its aims and methods were discussed by all the employes and published abroad for the information of all and sundry, including business rivals, instead of being thought out in the privacy of the General Manager's Office?

Three methods appear to be open to the National Government.

One is to leave things alone, and to allow matters to settle themselves along the Line of Least Resistance. This method is illustrated by Liberalism of the Manchester School.

A second is complete nationalisation. This is the method of Socialism.

A third is the method which allows for the activities of Group Action, and involves the encouragement of good employers.

This has been illustrated above, in the case of military organisation, by the utilisation of Pasley by the military authorities in 1812.

A study of the many varieties of industrial organisations, followed by a system of rewards and honours for successful industrial organisers, might help us out of our present impasse.

In the complex condition of the world to-day, it is rather a matter for surprise that so much of the machinery is work-

ing noiselessly than that the creaking of the portions that are out of gear is so loud.

It is surely the function of the State to ascertain by careful and exhaustive enquiry which portions of the machine are working smoothly, and which are most seriously out of gear.

It is well-known that there are many private industrial organisations in which no friction of any moment occurs, or at any rate only such friction as can be dealt with by the internal machinery of the organisation. Only contagion from disaffected areas, which seek to make a class war on account of what is practically civil strife within their own areas, can draw those well governed units into such a class war.

The proper action, therefore, on the part of the State would appear to be to act as the fountain of honour, rewarding the heads of the well-governed industries, and bringing severe discipline by means of legislation upon those areas of the

industrial world where the organisation is so bad that a private quarrel between masters and men becomes in time a public danger.

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